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ABSTRACT

This slide talk offers advice to adults to help children cope with nightmares. Children are encouraged (1) to assume power over the dream by drawing it; (2) separate the frightened part of the self from the problem-solving self; (3) let the picture describe the problem; (4) ask the picture to speak; (5) see how the dreamer's power matches the enemy's power; (6) ask the enemy why it came and what it wants; (7) state the dreamer's rights to be, feel safe, take space for oneself, and to discuss the fear and the issue; (8) negotiate a solution with the enemy in the dream-drawing that satisfies the dream-self; and (9) ultimately find real solutions. Adults are encouraged not to assume they know the right kind of help for the dreamer and to provide children permission and encouragement to help the victim-self in the picture, encourage the childs' powers of reason, allow the child to realize in his or her own time and way that dreams are also metaphoric life-position statements, stick to the manifest content of the dream, and follow the rule that the young dreamer is always innocent. Adults should realize that working on the literal level is a problem-solving exercise and that the goal is to help the dreamer satisfy the image of the frightened self. Generally, dreams are taken seriously. Additional advice is offered. (RH)

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Nightmare Help; A Guide for adults working with children. (Slide Talk)

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Slide 1. "HELP HELP"

Though no one knows for certain what Dreams are, frightening dreams demand our attention. We seek to find some way to deal with them, or they haunt us. Better that we find a way to **use** them for our own good, than leave them unattended, especially if they come as terrors and nightmares.

Why do we dream...I believe that every function has its purpose. Dreams bring us images and messages, useful on many levels; physical, spiritual, emotional, metaphoric, or practical and literal. When working with children's dreams I find it is quite sufficient to approach them at the literal level. If a monster or an image has come into your dream it definitely has something to tell you or show you. Why not give it a moment to explain.

slide 2. **The bad man hangs Marco by his feet, accusing him of things he didn't do.**

Drawing the image helps the dreamer assume power over it. Images symbolize feelings. The drawing is a visual translation of feelings. The issue is instantly visible. Marco wakes trembling under his bed. The images all have voices and the picture will speak!

slide 3. **SOLUTION: Marco designs a fair trial. A Day In Court to prove his innocence with a judge and jury who believe him.**

^try never to assume to know the right kind of help for the dreamer, I simply encourage him to think up a way to help the hanging boy. Marco needed a full day in court. (I have a hunch someone in his house is a lawyer or thinks like one.) There he was safe enough to confront the bad man and ask what he wants. (If you close your eyes and imagine yourself in the scene you can dialogue with any part of a dream. Try it yourself before you try to teach it. You will need to negotiate until you arrive at a solution that satisfies you both. You can learn even more by considering your monster a polarized demensions of yourself... the part that embodies your worst fears.)

slide 4. **Ozzi (6) is shouting in space helplessly attached to a rocket that is going to explode.** A child often needs permission and encouragement to help the victim-self in the picture, by reinforcing the childs right to life. Encourage the childs powers of reason. Help it find a way to help the self in the picture. With permission to use the imagination, there is always a way.

Ozzis Solution: was to return to the base rocket and ask how he could help the rocket get help. **The rocket said "my problem is too big for you to Handle, try some other way to communicate." Ozzi sent SOS signals and the earth crew heard it and sent help.**

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(Any solution that the dreamer feels possible, and which also empowers him, is worth trying. The more realistic and practical the solution the better, for this solution is often a metaphor of how he himself can be helped. (A child may be needing permission or support in seeking help for problems at home, from a source outside his home: *"This problem is too big for you to handel"*. *Most children are born with inate common sence, if given a chance to trust it.*)

slide 5. **A Brief Guide:**

- *** Assume power over the dream by drawing it.**
- *** Make the fear visible, and step outside of it. (separate the frightened part of the self from the problem solver self.)**
- *** Let the picture describe the problem**
- *** Ask the picture to speak (you can hear better with closed eyes)**
- *** See how the dreamers power matches the enemy's power**
- *** Ask the enemy Why it came and What it wants**
- *** State the dreamers rights (the right to Be, the right to feel safe, the right to take space for oneself, the right to discuss the fear and the issue.)**
- *** Negotiate; *MAKE A DEAL* with the enemy in the dream drawing, that satisfies the dream-self.**
- *** A solution is something that satisfies the dreamer, and is workable. (Super powers are ok for starters but a "real" solution is more satisfying in the long run, and can often be translated into the childs own day behavior.**

slide 6. **The Christmas Tree Ornament: Jack says he had this dream when he was 2 and 1/2 . He dreamed he was inside a giant blue Christmas tree ornament inside the belly of a live Christmas tree "he was too big and too scared to get out, and it had no feet".**

slide 7. **Jack's solution is to create a time machine that permits him to go back in time so he can enter the ornament and help the two and a half year old self grow feet, so he can stand on them and dare to break out of the ornament.**

The fact that dreams are also metaphoric life-position statements can remain hidden unless the child makes that connection himself. It is wiser and more tactful to skip it. The child may need to strengthen other skills first. If the dream is a disguised view of ourself, everyone needs time to realize their part in the problem. It's not necessary to rub it in. Projections are hard to accept at first. Usually dream issues are presented without judgement so we can have time to consider the problem belongs to the person in the picture, we need not feel defensive. (Stick to the manifest content of the dream, it is easier, more comfortable and still offers an adequate solution..) The dreamer is always innocent, this is a good rule.

Sharing dreams, especially nightmares, is usually a great relief, but dreams often divulge information which is new to the dreamers conscious mind. Better that a fear becomes a drawing than words too concrete to bear.

Dream Drawing as a classroom art project can be adjusted to any age group that understands the word dream. Children can share in pairs privately, work in small groups or use dreams to share common issues as a class. I believe dreams to be an organic natural form of inner communication, often astonishing but they need not be made more amazing or frightening than menstruation and night emissions, they just start earlier and last longer.

Making time for dreams at school, seems to me an organic opportunity to teach lifemanship using the childs own personal issue as your vehicle. It validates a very urgent real part of every students life which until receintly we have ignored. Drawing good dreams strengthens the childs hopes, and develops positive directions. Drawing good solutions to bad dreams taps fear befor it governs behavior and strengthens creative resources in oneself.

slide 8. **NIGHTMARES call for help.**

- Working on the literal level is a problem-solving exercise.
- The goal is to help the dreamer satisfy the image of the frightened self.
- Exercise imagination consciously.
- Experience strategies for self defense.
- Improve negotiation skills.
- Make room for anger. create effective ways to deal with projected emotions mirrored in the enemy's behavior.
- Take dreams seriously.

EMPOWERING CHILDREN TO EMPOWER THEMSELVES

slide 9. **Monsters are better alive than dead.** Killing is not the answer; nor is hiding under the bed, running away, or screaming for help. What really helps is to suggest the child think up a way to match the imagination of the dream with the imagination of their problem-solving mind. Boys are quick to choose violence. They simply kill the monster. But we find that killing highten fear, and confuses the teaching of peace without war, besides the monster may retaliate by coming back even more scary the next night. So we prefer to explore ways to outwit, cage, trap, or tame the monster so the child can talk to it .

slide 10. **Cage the monster...**

These examples are selected from over two hundred children age 4 to 13 from several private schools in the Boston area. I worked only with volunteers who chose to draw me their dreams for my book Nightmare Help. This selection represents common, typical issues and concerns of normal children. Here are some of the problems and solutions we encountered.

slide 11. **The Ice Cream Shooting machine; said it had to yell and scream and bombard Everett (11) because it needed help after giving treats and "holding things together all day." It wanted Everett to "stick around and help out." Everett said he had to run away to avoid being blamed and bombarded. (He said the Machine sounded just like his mother)** Everett negotiated a solution that modified the behavior of both parties. He agreed to "help-out" an hour a day if the Machine stopped blaming and bombarding him. (The verbatim dialogue is quite touching as he begins to understand the "Machines" point of view.

slide 12. The Mess-Up Monster in Thads dream; **Trapped in the world; said "messing -up" was the only way to get attention, and it was easier to mess-up than admit he was lonely and didn't know how to make friends.**

slide 13. Solution: **After making himself safe by imagining himself in Arizona's messa country, Thad decided he could speak to the monster by phone. He found a way to teach the mess-up monster how to make friends... the very thing he was having trouble doing himself. (All teachers teach the thing they need to know themselves? isn't it so?)** The program he proposed also helped me understand how he himself would accept help making friends so he could stop messing-up.

slide 14. The Burning House **dream helped Molly who was 4, face the fact that when she is left alone in her house she may have to think for herself in case of fire, even though she "isn't allowed to leave the house when her parents are away." nor "cross the street alone" or "reach the door knob without the help of a grown-up".**

In emergencies children need to know what they can do.
When screaming for Mom or dad isn't enough... it is time to try something. Hiding under the pillow or under the bed is not the answer. Children need to have **PERMISSION** and **encouragement** to practice autonomous behavior the minute we send them away from home, as well as **in** the home if we leave them alone. Some parents don't realize how *obedience in children is often stronger than self preservation.* Since children are apt to be very literal, conflicting messages often appear in dreams demanding clarification.

slide 15. The Bicycle Race "Accident" showed Ron the power of jealousy that makes a boy (like himself) wish harm to his best friend. Dealing with this feeling shocked him and worried him, he had to avoid his friend all morning. (It was an unfair race because the bicycles were not equally new.)

slide 16. Rons' solution **was to negotiate a fair race using the same bike so the race was a tie.** The solution avoided jealousy all together. But the dream gave him a chance to consider how jealous he might feel to loose to a faster rider. Jealousy can make a person feel like killing.

slide 17. The Unacceptable Divorce dream, **Joanna imagined a way she could help her friends "bounce back" as the fell into the cracked earth when their family's divorce felt like" the end of the world." (She drew a trampoline into the gaping crack in the world.) Joanna also drew her Grandmother into her picture who could comfort her, and tell her "divorce was hard to accept but not the end of the world." She made the parents in her dream picture say that their fighting was "not her fault."** Working through these images aired her "unspeakable fear", She found she was not as helpless as she thought.

Slide 18. Out Over my Head shows Joan (5) unable to get her fathers attention even by falling overboard, because he is too engrossed in his new girl friend. Joan decides drowning doesn't help. Instead she swims over and gets his attention. She says to her father in her picture "if your not going to notice me at all, then don't invite me to go out in your boat when your girl friend is here, I feel left out and jealous enough to drown myself." (When she showed her father this drawing, he appreciated her mature good humor.)

slide 19. The Tractor and the Baby Tree dream shows Mindy (age 5) that she has feelings like the baby tree that got run over in her dream picture. She decides that the baby tree had some rights. Even though the tractor says he doesn't care about the little tree and he didn't ask for her to be planted there," Mindy says" it's not the baby trees fault that the seed rooted there and can't move. "

slide 20. Mindys' solution was to build a house around her tree, with a skylight for sun, to protect it until it grows big enough to offer the tractor some shade. She thinks by then it will be friends.

What ever dreams are... their imagery seems to be the language of the feelings.

These drawings are all taken from the original work of the children who let me work with them. This collection and the verbatim dialogues which led to these solutions are included in my book **NIGHTMARE HELP , A Guide for adults working with children.** From children for children. (available through ANSAYRE PRESS 284 Huron Ave. Cambridge Ma. 02138 USA.)